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ABSTRACT

The impact of the current employment situation on hiring faculty for community college teaching is examined. It is concluded that prospects for improving the quality of learning in community colleges are not particularly enhanced by the apparently growing surplus of new PhDs in our field. On the contrary, it is suggested that hiring PhDs for community college teaching can be a serious mistake. Most PhDs would not be happy working under community college conditions; e.g., teaching only basic courses with virtually not support for research or other professional activities. Moreover, education toward a doctorate does not prepare these graduates to do the kind of job needed in a community college. (Author/KM)

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Can Community Colleges Survive the PhD Glut?

JC 740 102

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Can Community Colleges Survive the PhD Glut?

The chairperson of a speech and theatre department in a large urban-suburban community college examines the impact of the current employment situation on hiring faculty for community college teaching, and concludes that prospects for improving the quality of learning in community colleges are not particularly enhanced by the apparently growing surplus of new PhDs in our field. On the contrary, it is suggested that hiring PhDs for community college teaching can be a serious mistake.

Let me share with you the observations about the current employment situation that prompt this paper.

1. Undergraduate enrollments seem to be declining somewhat at four-year colleges and universities across the country while growing at community colleges and technical schools. At the same time, graduate school enrollments seem to be remaining fairly high.

2. This has created a growing unemployment pool of highly educated people. Note that at the opening of the 1973-74 academic year, approximately 300 enrollees in the SCA Placement Service did not have full-time jobs in education; and that during this hiring year, many PhDs accepted employment at less than $10,000.

Given those circumstances, it isn't surprising that the prospect of increasing numbers of PhD's seeking and finding employment in community colleges is becoming more and more common. That prospect elicits my reflections. My question is, "Can community colleges survive the PhD glut?"

You might reasonably inquire, "What concerns you about this prospect? You have more and better educated job applicants. What is the problem?"

I see several.

First, better educated is not necessarily better prepared to teach in a community college. To be prepared for community college teaching, several things are important, but one most of all. You "gotta wanta." It is a tough job, both physically and emotionally demanding. To survive happily in a community college environment, you need to <u>want</u> to be there.

In view of that, I find depressing a recent survey by the UCLA Center for Junior College Studies that reported 40% of the people currently

employed in community colleges would rather be in a four-year college or university (Cohen, 1971). I'm sure it is conservative to conclude that far more than 40% of new PhD's, given a choice, would rather be employed in four-year colleges or universities than in community colleges. Moreover, in my opinion, far more than 40% of them SHOULD be employed in four-year colleges or universities. Their graduate training has prepared them for a high degree of specialization, departmentalization, professionalism, and research orientation. They will find precious little of any of these in community colleges.

Let me amplify. The research that a faculty member may do at a community college must either be supported by his own overtime efforts and money or directed toward improving teaching methods and materials. Teachers in community colleges find little support for basic research or even applied research in the areas that are currently popular for study in our field. And as for specializing, the teacher will find little opportunity to specialize other than in teaching the basic speech communication course or the introductory course in acting and stagecraft. One study reported that 96% of faculty in public community colleges enrolling under 5,000 teach the basic speech course (Meyer, 1973). Moreover, 85.6% of the students in colleges enrolling 2,000 or more are in speech classes--doubtless almost all of them in the basic speech course. Most of our college bulletins show that we offer other, second level or sophomore courses, usually as many as 8-10 (Meyer, 1973; Taylor, 1970). But few of these are offered even as often as once a year. Only the largest community colleges offer sophomore classes in speech communication or theatre more often than once every two years.

Departmentalization? In the majority of community colleges speech and theatre departments as such do not exist. In the 327 public community colleges in 1972 enrolling 2,000 students or more, only 53% had separate departments of speech and theatre. Of the more than 700 colleges enrolling less than 2,000, very few have separate departments. Speech communication or theatre teachers in most community colleges will find themselves located in divisions of communication, humanities, fine arts, or even (horrors) in English departments.

Professionalization? While some of us in community colleges turn to professional associations because it provides us with the contacts within our profession that we miss among our faculty colleagues, we must largely support our professional activities ourselves. We receive little money for travel, and even less encouragement to leave our classrooms in order to participate in professional activities.

So that is problem No. 1, and it is the big one: most of the new PhD's turning to us in search of employment will not be happy in the environment they find here. Their aspirations lead them to desire a different kind of work environment. Equally disturbing to me about the trend toward hiring PhD's for community college teaching is that their education has not prepared them to do the kind of job that needs to be done. Let me use a personal illustration.

At Florissant when we look for a new faculty member, we look for someone who is properly prepared by formal education, of course. That means a masters degree in either speech or theatre with background to teach a basic introductory course in speech. More importantly, however, we look for someone who has the personal qualities that will enable her or him to acquire the following value priorities:

1. Our faculty must learn to think of themselves first as teachers; and above all else as teachers.

2. Their next identification will need to be as a member of the staff of the college; committment to this college is expected to be equally important with committment to a particular professional specialization.

3. Our staff should be more interested in doing research that will improve their students' learning that which will get in the latest issue of Speech Monographs or QJS.

4. Finally, our faculty need to be interested in and responsive to the community which the college serves. Our product is not the traditional 18-21 year-old college student. We serve students of a wide range of ages with remarkably different backgrounds from traditional college students. Most come from the community, have families here, and probably will remain here. Most have little previous contact with either the mores or the mystique of higher education. Most come to us from lower-middle class or blue-collar backgrounds and expect college to help them improve their lot, not their minds. We are supported by those students and the taxes of that community, and faculty are expected to be responsive to the needs of both.

We look for people who can be flexible, open and student-centered, and who are capable of believing two things that are very difficult to believe:

1. Even though many--if not most--of our students would, in all traditonal educational settings, fail, those students <u>can</u> succeed.

2. Even though our students do not have aspirations toward the intellectual "good life," higher education has something to offer them. Even though most of our students want simply to acquire the means for the the material "good life," college is still a place for them.

In sum, our faculty should believe that these students--the ones Patricia Cross describes as "new students" (Cross, 1971)--deserve a place in college and a chance to succeed here.

Now I ask you, does that sound like what your PhD program prepared you for? Does that sound like many PhD's you know?

Lets me clear. The needs I have just outlined are not just platitudes, and we don't seek romanticists. There is no place in the community college for either sloppy sentimentality or intellectual elitism. And while I am convinced that PhD education does not create sloppy sentimentality, I am equally convinced that it does create intellectual elitists. "Them we don't need." And that is problem No. 2 with the trend toward hiring PhD's for community college teaching: PhD education does not prepare a person for community college employment.

Prospects for changes in the graduate schools are not too encouraging either. Dr. Joseph Cosand, now Professor of Higher Education at the University of Michigan, formerly U.S. Deputy Commissioner of Education, and before that President of the St. Louis Junior College District, pointed out:

"There are practically no strong pre-service collegiate programs for community college staff members, and those there are provide only a small fraction of the qualified personnel needed. An increasing number of

so-called pre-service programs have been established, but they are generally inadequate or worse than nothing" (O'Banion, 1972).

The Doctor of Arts degree is gaining very slow acceptance in our profession. Resistance to new graduate programs when the need for more degreed people is not clearly established has slowed the spread of the D.A., though it is an approach sorely needed. At least it is a teaching degree and offers some academic respectability in our profession for "methods" research. I am more hopeful that the employment situation and the pressure from the few D.A. programs in existence will encourage changes in existing PhD programs. Though my personal preference is that the two degrees have two separate orientations, the PhD for research and the D.A. for teaching, that is probably unrealistic. Therefore, I welcome any movement that promises to involve more emphasis on teaching in PhD education as a step in the right direction.

Another encouraging prospect, though one that unfortunately meets almost as much emotional resistance as the D.A., is the SCA-ADASC plan to promote faculty exchange. Some--not many--graduate schools are now trying to add some courses that deal with community college teaching and administration. But most are atrociously bad because the graduate professor teaching a course called "The Community College" who had never been within the walls of one may be apocryphal, but it is not far from reflecting the true state of university professors' awareness of the community college environment. My own experience is probably not unusual. Going to my 5:30 class one night, I encountered a group in the hall who were conspicuously not sure where they were. Recognizing a pleasant-faced, white-haired gentleman as the leader of the group, I inquired if I

could be of assistance. "Oh no," he replied, "this is just my 'community college' class from X-university, and we came over to visit your campus to observe a 'typical' community college."

Most of you recognize the absurdity of his statement without my explanation; but if you do not, suffice it to say that anyone who thinks a large, urban, brand-new and (at the time) well-financed college is "typical" should NOT be teaching a course called "The Community College."

Graduate faculty need to learn what this environment is before they can help students prepare for teaching here. And that awareness can only be partially achieved through visits, books or acquaintance with some of our teachers. That is why the faculty exchange idea is particularly attractive.

Also encouraging is to see some colleges of education recruiting professors with community college experience. To see a Dr. Cosand at Michigan or Bill Moore at Ohio State is heartening. But have we yet seen much of that among departments of speech and theatre as they hire professors of speech education?

Another attractive idea--one I have yet to see initiated anywhere--is being implemented in north Texas. There doctoral faculty and administrators at the Dallas County Community College and the Tarrant County Junior College are appointed as adjunct faculty at some of the graduate schools and teach fully accredited graduate courses in community college teaching and administration.

To be honest, however, these trends are too few; we are encountering too much resistance and finding too little support to give me much hope that change in the graduate schools will occur in time. We in

education are notoriously slow to adopt change; and since the employment glut is here and the graduate school reforms sometime in the future, our prognosis is not very good. Right now, our only solution rests with us in community colleges who do the hiring. We must recruit very, very carefully and must be certain that we have our priorities straight so that we choose on the basis of the proper criteria. We must base our choice on those all-important personal characteristics: flexibility, openness, student-centeredness, emotional and physical toughness, ability to empathize with the working-man's world as well as with the intellectual and professional, and the ability to believe in nearly impossible goals.

Lest we do: I don't think community colleges can survive the PhD glut. We'll instead become "junior colleges," dumping grounds for those not yet lucky enough to capture a job among our superiors at the senior colleges and universities, places where the unlucky ones wait unhappily, imitating the higher education opinion leaders until the coveted job opens up or until retirement. That is not a pretty prospect. I trust we are smart enough to avoid it.

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